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ABSTRACT

Conflict is inevitable when people work together because they have different points of view, values, and ways of working. Resolving conflicts can be extremely difficult because of these differences. This short guidebook addresses ways successful leaders can work to manage conflict in the workplace, in particular conflict with people who report to them, called "direct reports" in this publication. The guide begins with a short overview of conflict and resolution, focusing on conflict between managers and direct reports. It discusses ways to manage the relationship with and work of direct reports. The guide continues with a four-point process for managing conflict between managers and direct reports. The process includes recognizing both sides of the conflict, preparing for the resolution of the conflict, managing a conflict-resolution session, and reflecting on the situation and its solution to learn lessons that can be applied to future conflict situations. The guide concludes with a worksheet for recording a conflict-resolution experience, a short list of suggested readings, and a summary of key points. (WFA)

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IDEAS INTO ACTION GUIDEBOOKS

FOR THE PRACTICING MANAGER

Managing Conflict with Direct Reports

Barbara Popejoy and Brenda J. McManigle

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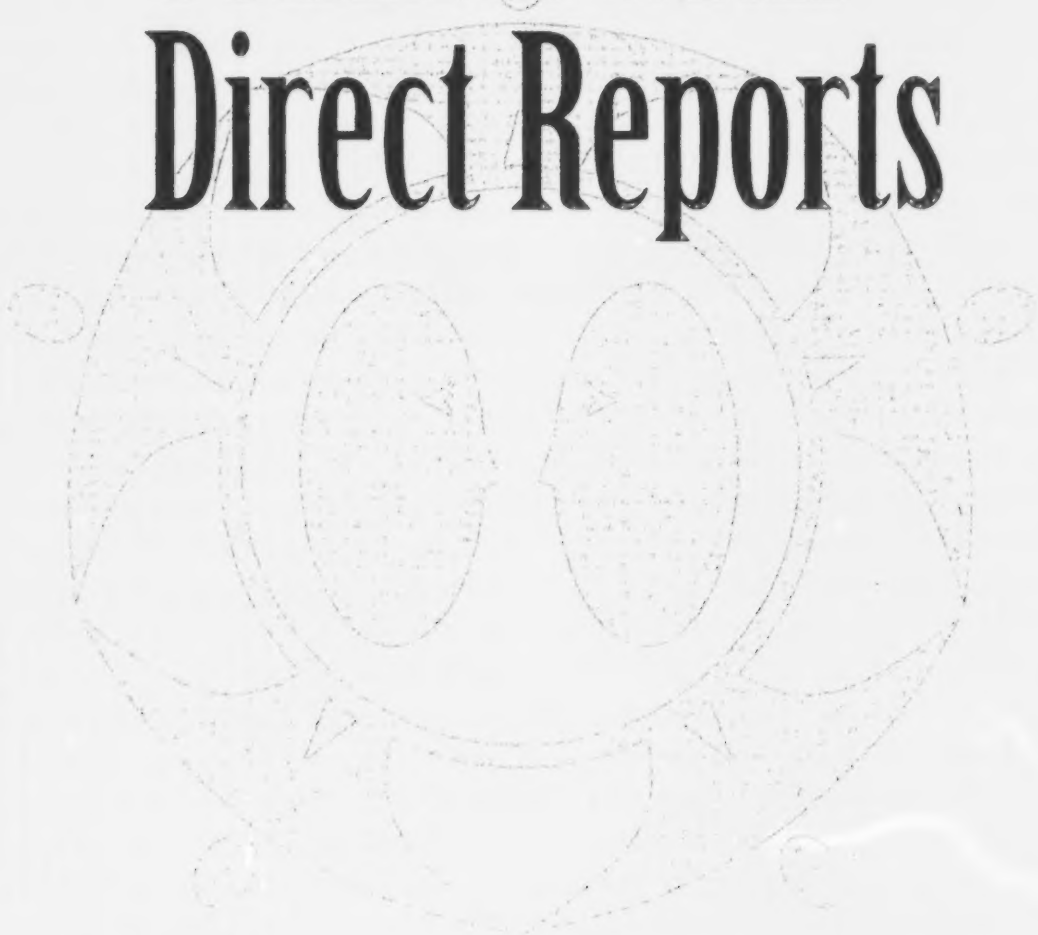
Managing Conflict with Direct Reports



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Aimed at managers and executives who are concerned with their own and others' development, each guidebook in this series gives specific advice on how to complete a developmental task or solve a leadership problem.

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AN IDEAS INTO ACTION GUIDEBOOK

Managing Conflict with Direct Reports

Barbara Popejoy and Brenda J. McManigle

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Creative Leadership
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The Ideas Into Action Guidebook Series

This series of guidebooks draws on the practical knowledge that the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) has generated in the course of more than thirty years of research and educational activity conducted in partnership with hundreds of thousands of managers and executives. Much of this knowledge is shared – in a way that is distinct from the typical university department, professional association, or consultancy. CCL is not simply a collection of individual experts, although the individual credentials of its staff are impressive; rather it is a community, with its members holding certain principles in common and working together to understand and generate practical responses to today's leadership and organizational challenges.

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Executive Brief

Conflict is inevitable when people work together, and it's one of the most difficult challenges facing managers. But it's a challenge that successful leaders learn to address. Managers who develop an understanding of difference without judgment and are willing to see more than one perspective or solution are in a good position to manage conflict with their direct reports.

Conflict between managers and direct reports highlights a power relationship and affects the work itself – the tasks for which managers and direct reports share responsibility. Managers who look to see both sides of conflict can resolve it, but it means assessing the differences between themselves and their direct reports and finding out how those differences affect the conflict.

After assessing those differences, managers can devise a plan to use before, during, and after a conflict resolution session. They will be better prepared to understand emotions that can trigger conflict, to clarify performance expectations so their direct reports know what's expected of them, and to provide ongoing feedback for the support and development of their direct reports.

Conflict and Resolution

Conflict occurs when people possess or express contrary values, interests, goals, orientations, principles, or feelings. Resolving conflict in any circumstance can be extremely difficult because of those differences. But there's little disagreement on one point – managers consistently rank the ability to effectively deal with conflict near the top of essential leadership skills.

The Center for Creative Leadership's (CCL) long-standing research into executive derailment of U.S. and European managers shows that problems with interpersonal relationships (including the inability to manage conflict) is the number one cause of managerial careers going off track. Successful leaders understand that managing conflict is an essential part of maintaining effective interpersonal relationships, but that doesn't make it easy. Changing demographics, a cross-cultural workforce, turbulent shifts in the global economy and

Managing Conflict Most Sought-After Skill

In CCL's Foundations of Leadership program, participants consistently indicate that the ability to handle conflict is one of the skills most needed and applicable to their leadership. In response to an assessment survey (using the multi-rater SKILLSCOPE® instrument) that asked what skill area they most needed to develop, more than 1,100 managers rated *confronts others skillfully* and *effective at managing conflict* as numbers 2 and 3 respectively (*avoids spreading self too thin* came in at number 1). The more than 6,800 bosses, peers, and direct reports responding to this same instrument ranked *effective at managing conflict* and *confronts others skillfully* as numbers 1 and 2, respectively. *Avoids spreading self too thin* came in at number 3.

in global politics, new relationships between organizations and their employees, and other influences can define the conflicts that arise in organizations and affect strategies for managing them.

Managing and leading in such turbulent times requires you to develop an understanding of multiple perspectives, to be willing to reshape your point of view, and to face incompatible demands in yourself, between yourself and others, and in your organization. A successful conflict management strategy encompasses an understanding of difference and a willingness to see both sides of the conflict. Such an approach can help you tackle one of the most challenging aspects of leading others.

Conflict with Direct Reports Is a Special Case

Conflict at work can arise for many different reasons between you and your boss, you and your peers, and you and your direct reports – in short, between any two or more people who may not share the same vision, personality, tactics, or culture. But conflict between you and a direct report is a special case that highlights two particular areas. One, it brings into play the working relationship between you and your direct report and affects how that relationship is built, maintained, and managed to achieve results. Two, it affects the work itself – the management of tasks and the strategies for achieving goals for which you and your direct report share responsibility. In either case it's important for you to see both sides of the conflict.

Managing the Relationship

Business media talk a lot about empowered workers, flat organizations, and new networked ways of doing business, but the primary organizational relationship is still manager to direct report. New managers, riding a wave of success in having achieved results on their own merits, often find it difficult to make the shift from a top-performing individual contributor to a role in which they direct others to get results. Balancing the technical skills that brought them to a management position with the interpersonal skills that such a position demands can take some time to master.

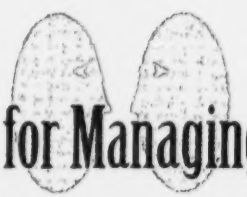
The relationship between manager and direct report is one of the few relationships in which clear position power is still at play in organizations, and you should always consider the dynamics of that relationship during a conflict situation. As you work to see both sides of a conflict, ask yourself if you want or need your direct reports to demonstrate a certain degree of compliance (to meet the basic requirements of the task), or whether you need their commitment (to show a willingness to go beyond the basics) to achieve the results the organization expects. In organizations that rely on a hierarchical order, a direct report's compliance is often all that a manager expects and needs. More contemporary, networked organizations often require commitment beyond compliance because carrying out any more than the most basic, short-term tasks is otherwise nearly impossible to sustain.

Managing the Work

Conflict can occur when your direct report is working below your expectations or is having difficulty adapting to unfamiliar assignments. Many managers mistakenly think that a direct report who is excellent at doing many tasks is able to execute all tasks. The flip side to that thinking characterizes a direct report who does not

execute some tasks well as being unable to carry out any task at all. Managers with that perspective are prone to micromanaging and are reluctant to delegate responsibilities. Typically, such managers delegate a task, but when the result doesn't meet their expectations they take it back and do it themselves. As a result, these managers take on more work and lose confidence in the direct report's abilities. It also discourages the direct report, who can lose confidence and perform below expectations.

To avoid conflict from arising in these kinds of situations, it's important that you are very clear on your expectations and the results you're looking for. At the same time, be flexible enough to allow your direct reports some leeway in getting those results. Try to see the task from their point of view and to appreciate their approach to carrying out the work. It might not be the way you would do it, but if the results meet your expectations, step back and offer recognition instead of managing the work for them and possibly starting conflict.



A Process for Managing Conflict

Despite your best efforts in managing your relationship with your direct reports and in delegating work responsibilities in a way that promotes development and trust, conflicts are bound to arise. Without a clear strategy for dealing with these conflicts your working relationship with your direct reports will suffer damage, which will make it more difficult for your unit to perform as well as it might.

Taken to Task

You can follow a few simple steps to make your leadership more effective and to minimize the chances of conflict arising when delegating responsibility to direct reports.

First, define what needs to be done, how it is to be done, when it needs to be done, and with whom they should work to achieve the result. As your direct reports learn the task, frequently provide feedback about their performance. It's helpful if you add some context – why the task is important and how it fits into the work of the organization.

When your direct reports know the job well, it's time to completely hand off the task. Check in with them first; they may still be cautious about doing the task alone. Be careful not to confuse cautiousness for lack of knowledge or drive. Let your direct reports have control of how the task should be carried out. Make sure you understand their point of view about the work and how they plan to carry it out.

When your direct reports are fully confident in carrying out the work, step back. They may not want much feedback at this point other than recognition and appreciation. In carrying out assigned tasks in a manner that makes sense and is effective for them, your direct reports build internal motivation and reward.

CCL recommends a process for managing conflict between managers and direct reports that has a good record for achieving results even as it helps maintain working relationships and performance. This four-point process includes recognizing both sides of the conflict, preparing for the resolution of the conflict, managing a conflict resolution session, and then reflecting on the situation and its solution to learn lessons you can apply to future conflict situations.

Recognizing Both Sides of the Conflict

Conflict is a natural and unavoidable consequence of work because people have different views, values, and ways of getting results. In managing the relationship you have with your direct reports and in managing the work the organization has asked of your group, uncovering those differences can go a long way toward resolving conflict with your direct reports or avoiding it altogether. You can start with an honest assessment of yourself as a manager. When conflict happens, take ownership of your part in it. Don't assume that the direct report, current business conditions, or the organizational culture is the source of the conflict.

To get a clear picture of what you might be contributing to the conflict you'll need to do some hard thinking about yourself in your role as manager and about how your direct reports respond to you. There are many tools available to help you gain a clearer picture of yourself. For example, formal 360-degree assessment gathers feedback from your boss, peers, and direct reports related to your behavior and performance. Comparing their responses to your own can show you how closely your view of yourself aligns with how others view your behavior and perspectives. Another option is to videotape yourself during meetings. Afterward, watch your reactions and those of others. If you're uncomfortable using videotape or if circumstances make it difficult to use, ask a colleague to observe you and to provide feedback on a regular basis.

Although you can realistically take personal responsibility only for your own contribution to a conflict situation, it's helpful if you can assess the role your direct report plays in the situation. By observing (and providing feedback on) your direct report's behavior as it relates to the conflict, you can better identify and clarify the boundaries between you.

On page 14 is a simple assessment you can use to uncover conflicts related to differences that might arise between you and your direct reports. For the most revealing results, you and they should fill out a copy of the form. Keep in mind that this isn't an evaluative tool but merely a way to open discussion on differences that can spawn conflict. Set aside some time when you can share your responses with individual direct reports and with the entire group (they might learn something about one another that might alleviate potential conflict among them). When you sit down to talk, compare your responses and use those points of difference to discuss and clarify roles and expectations.

When it comes to recognizing both sides of a conflict, it's helpful to review past experiences when you've been in conflict with a direct report. As you review the circumstances of those previous situations, use the statements that follow to find patterns in your behavior (or in the behavior of your direct report) that might negatively or positively affect the conflict. Keep in mind that these statements can apply to both sides of a conflict. Note specific skills you want to develop to increase your effectiveness in resolving conflict with the people you manage. Discuss those actions with a colleague who can provide feedback on your efforts and progress.

Clear objectives and effective communication keep conflict at bay. It's important that you have made your objectives clear to your direct reports and that you don't jump into action or assign tasks without first deciding and communicating the goal. Make sure they understand exactly what their tasks are, what the final objectives are, and how success will be measured. Ask them to describe their understanding. Many performance problems that spark conflict between managers and their direct reports stem from a misunderstanding about performance expectations, so it's important that both sides understand what the work is.

Dealing with Difference: An Exploration

Darken the circle that indicates where you see yourself along a range between these paired responses.

In my work I see myself as

a team member. ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ an individual.

When it comes to achieving goals, I tend to use

straight-ahead, hard-charging tactics. ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ persuasion and influence.

In this organization, supervisors and staff

are equal partners in the work. ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ have different authority over the work.

When faced with shifting goals, strategies, and challenges, I

feel uncomfortable when things change. ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ look forward to the changes and adapt.

When I have to learn a new skill, I

like to engage in an unfamiliar experience and learn by doing. ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ prefer to learn the basics of a new skill from an expert.

During work and away from the job

I feel that there's not enough time to accomplish or enjoy all of my goals and interests. ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ I don't worry much about the clock because time is beyond my control.

In social situations I enjoy

being part of the most active group. ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ small conversations and watching others.

Consider solutions other than your own for achieving results. There are many ways to correct a problem or complete a task. No one can possibly know every approach. Be flexible and think beyond your perspective. View the world through the eyes of your direct reports and try to understand their points of view. Don't ask for input if you've already made up your mind, because your direct reports will perceive you as insincere and trust in your relationship with them will be damaged. If you already have a solution in mind, keep it to yourself until the issue has been discussed or share it as part of a group decision-making process.

More than one style of leadership can get the job done. The task ahead, the response of your direct reports, the organizational climate – all of these can influence how you lead in different situations. Some people don't respond well to a hard-driving managerial style, and high anxiety levels impede their performance. Other people interpret a soft approach as a signal that you aren't serious and that the task you've assigned isn't important to the organization. Look for a mismatch between your management style and your direct report's work style. Focus on desired results rather than the manner in which tasks are completed.

Emotional triggers can cause behavior that creates conflict. Almost all of us have tender areas in our psyches that elicit an automatic and unproductive response (those knee-jerk reactions). Try to identify what sets you off. Pay attention to physical cues such as a rise in body temperature, shortness of breath, or rapid heartbeat. There are many techniques, such as deep breathing, that can bring these reactions into check and allow you to stay in control of your emotions.

Resolving conflict isn't the same thing as negotiation. The belief that both sides of a conflict need to give something up in order to reach a compromise can trap you into thinking you're

The Look of Conflict

Terry is your newest direct report. He marked the highest ratings possible on the mid-year self-assessment of performance. You are particularly concerned about the high ratings on executing the basic duties of the position. Terry's impressions do not match your perceptions. In fact, you believe his performance barely met expectations. Terry doesn't meet deadlines and his work frequently contains errors that have to be corrected by others.

- Have you been clear in communicating your expectations and objectives?
- Does Terry have the skills necessary to achieve the results you want?
- Have you provided timely and frequent feedback to Terry about his behavior and performance?

losing. This can make you feel that you are weak and cause you to react to an emotional trigger in a way that only exacerbates the conflict. Or it may drive you to win at all costs, which makes the power dynamic the overriding force in your direct report relationship.

Both sides of a conflict have feelings about the situation. Feelings, along with beliefs and attitudes, influence behavior. Try to view circumstances objectively. Imagine for a moment that you are someone else – a disinterested outsider – and try to react to the situation rather than to the direct report with whom you're having a conflict. Likewise, you can often influence the behavior of your direct reports to alleviate a conflict situation by taking their feelings into consideration.

Differences make the organization stronger and more creative. People different from you add valuable talent and perspectives that you would otherwise not have. Don't let differences

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of gender, religion, race, age, culture, or ethnicity affect your view of your direct reports' behavior, performance, or attitude. Build comfort and understanding by getting to know your direct reports on a personal level. You may find that you share common experiences, hopes, and perspectives.

Conflict among your direct reports saps strength and creativity. Your direct reports won't always work conflict out among themselves. Define limits, expectations, and guidelines for your workgroup in a timely fashion. Move quickly to resolve conflict situations before they negatively affect the group's performance. If you have a direct report who is purposely negative or resistant to your group's work, and the response to your feedback remains unsatisfactory, there may be personal issues at the root of the conflict. This situation may require professional help that you aren't qualified to give. If you suspect this is the case, speak to your organization's HR professional.

Every decision has conflicting interests and constituencies. There are trade-offs or consequences to every decision. Learn to assess and prioritize what is important both in the short and the long term. Clearly communicate those priorities to your direct reports and follow up to make sure they're understood. Also keep in mind that groups often make the best decisions because the group process increases commitment to the decision. Help your direct reports develop analytical skills by including them in decision making. If you are mentoring or evaluating a direct report for possible promotion, assign that person the task of making some decisions. Begin with small ones and move up to more significant challenges.

Support direct reports during times of change. Fear and loss play a large role in resistance to change. Manage resistance by providing support during transitions. Listen and acknowledge

feelings. Give what information you can and, without over-promising, give assurance to your direct reports. Assess the specific organizational and environmental issues – such as lack of resources and promotional opportunities, threat of layoffs, and feelings of unfair treatment – that may be affecting your direct reports. Often these issues arise from a lack of information. If the problem is related to organizational systems, such as a reward system that is out of line with the organization's goals, go to your boss to discuss that misalignment. If the problem is related to the environment (new competitors or a change in the political landscape), discuss those changes with your direct reports and seek ways all of you can adapt to those changes together.

The best will rise – with help. Don't speak or behave in ways that make your direct reports feel stupid or unvalued. Publicly acknowledge good results; communicate privately when your expectations are unmet. Teach and encourage your direct reports to think for themselves. It's not fair to expect them to accomplish tasks they aren't capable of doing. If there's a mismatch between their skills and the demands of the task, arrange the work to incorporate the necessary developmental experiences. Provide training, mentoring, and coaching. If none of your direct reports is ready for the task at hand, take it on yourself and enlist them to provide support until they are familiar, comfortable, and skilled enough to take on the work themselves.

Manage strengths. Using your strengths to excess can become a weakness. Many managers derail because they apply those behaviors and talents that come easily and naturally to them in most circumstances without developing new skills and capabilities. Part of your leadership task is to *manage* the work of your direct reports, not to *do* the work of your direct reports. Be flexible by using ap-

proaches your direct reports suggest for problem solving or achieving results and, if successful, make them part of your own arsenal.

Preparing for a Conflict Resolution Session

A second important element to resolving a conflict between you and your direct report is to prepare a strategy for managing the situation. Before engaging in the actual encounter, consider using the following as a template for action.

Plan for the interaction. Identify and describe the conflict. Write down the salient points, possible resolutions, and potential consequences. Focus on behaviors. Stick to what you have observed and avoid perceptions, innuendo, gossip, judging motivation, or analyzing intent.

Describe the conflict situation and consider how it might play out. Ask yourself

- What are potential consequences?
- What are potential outcomes?
- Will this interaction be a short-term fix or will it contribute to this direct report's development?

Your direct report might not always greet a conflict resolution session with enthusiasm. Anticipate and plan for a negative response. You can help the situation by focusing your observations of your direct report's behavior and its impact on the group's performance. Don't detour into judgments or infer motivation for your direct report's behavior.

Choose a setting. A conflict resolution session can be as formal as setting an appointment to have a dialogue, or it can be as informal as stopping by the direct report's desk for a chat. You can engage your direct report in a social context (over lunch, for example, which will get you both away from the office and its distrac-

tions so you can concentrate on the dialogue). Or you can call a "time out" during a heated discussion. The important thing is to have the intention to work through the difficulty and to focus on your relationship with the direct report and your responsibility to manage the task. Choose the venue with an eye to what is appropriate to the conflict. Having a serious discussion about performance over lunch may send the signal that the problem is not all that serious.

When you do get together with your direct report, there are a few guidelines that will help you keep the conversation focused on resolving the conflict and avoid falling into a trap of blaming or justifying. Review these simple guidelines before meeting with your direct report so that they're fresh in your mind.

Visualize the conflict resolution session. You may wish to jot down some notes, bullet points, or even write a script of what you would like to say and what responses you anticipate from your direct report. When you have the conversation you won't read from your script, of course, but creating one lets you imagine possible roads to a successful outcome. You can mentally rehearse how to communicate the key points you want to make so that you can organize your time and your thoughts and don't waste this valuable conversation on details that don't alleviate the conflict.

Establish an atmosphere that is oriented toward finding a solution. The first step is to establish a sense of trust so your conversation can be honest and effective. Acknowledge potential sources of conflict arising from differences (values, cultural drivers, styles, perspectives, learning preferences). Seek to understand what it is like to be in this person's shoes. Demonstrate empathy.

Communicate respect and communicate respectfully. Be aware of your own behavior and leadership style. Think about what it would be like to be on the other side, dealing with you as a

The Look of Conflict

You were recently promoted to a new management position in a neighboring division of your company. It was hard for you to accept it because you were very happy with your old job, but this management opportunity seemed like a dream job. Stacy, a long-time employee of the company and lead designer in the group you are now managing, comes to you and says she was promised your job by the previous leadership. She is very upset and says she passed up another management opportunity because she was assured this one was "in the bag."

- What is your motivation in resolving this conflict?
- What solution can you suggest that offers Stacy an opportunity to prepare for management?
- What solution does Stacy have to this conflict?
- What will you say to members of the group who had expected to work for her?

manager. Think about how you want to be viewed once the conflict is resolved, as this will have a bearing on the trust that's part of your working relationship.

Get the facts and avoid judging the other side. Consider the other person's point of view. Allow for all perspectives to be reviewed dispassionately and fairly. Ask questions so you can learn all the circumstances. Make sure you have the information you need to work toward a resolution.

During the Conflict Resolution Session

After you have reviewed the items mentioned above in preparation for a discussion, you are ready to conduct a one-to-one conflict resolution session. The following guidelines can help you

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conduct a session that gives both sides a good chance of moving toward a resolution.

Establish a climate for mutual problem solving. Indicate your desire to seek a mutually satisfactory and satisfying outcome that will be the best for both sides and the organization.

Define the problem from your point of view. When defining the problem, be sure to be specific in describing the situation (who, what, where, when), the behaviors displayed, and the impact of those behaviors on others and on decisions, processes, and outcomes.

Ask your direct report to define the problem from his or her point of view. Find common ground. Identify issues on which you both agree and disagree. Use analogies, metaphors, or pictures if that helps to identify a problem. This strategy tempers the possibility of a sense of personal accusation and sets up some creative possibilities.

Identify and evaluate potential solutions. Don't be afraid to go for unusual or creative solutions put forth by either side. Re-

The Look of Conflict

You supervise a group of field sales representatives. Last quarter's results were spectacular and many of the reps received bonus packages, including a trip to Hawaii. The troops celebrate after the announcement is made, and morale is very high. But as the group's manager you're responsible for the details. In running through the numbers you notice a discrepancy in the information one of your direct reports has submitted to you. It could be an honest mistake or some other miscommunication – even a simple math error. Before addressing what might erupt into a volatile conflict, you know you have to suspend judgment until you have all the facts.

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Culture Clash?

Gender, race, religion, age, culture, and ethnicity are key differences among individuals. Contemporary managers come up against these differences every day. It's important for you to recognize them and to come to terms with any discomfort that arises when you lead people who are different from yourself. Cultural differences to be aware of include

- sources and expressions of identity
- sources and expressions of authority
- means and goals of achievement
- responses to uncertainty and change
- means of acquiring knowledge
- orientation to time
- responses to natural and social environment.

member that solutions derived together can be better than either of you might have thought of individually. Solicit information from your direct report, listen, build on ideas, and synthesize. Together, choose a solution that each of you can accept and that moves toward a resolution.

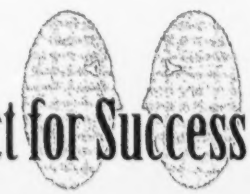
Develop an action plan for implementation. Define the behaviors and the results you expect to see from your direct report. Make sure he or she understands exactly what you expect. Find out how he or she sees the work going forward.

Plan follow-up meetings to check on progress. Structure some formal feedback sessions and some general conversations to help your direct report stay on track and to manage the conflict so it moves toward a positive resolution.

Point 4 After the Conflict Resolution Session

Spend some time reflecting on what you learned from the discussion. As with any leadership situation, you become better at conflict resolution as you gain experience and get more comfortable dealing with the emotional, political, and personal facets of the conflict.

Use the questions on the following page as a self-guided tour for your most recent conflict resolution session and every time you participate in a similar situation. Spend a few minutes writing out brief answers. Review these notes before your next session so you can remember your past experiences and learn from them.



Managing Conflict for Success and Development

Today's leaders, at all organizational levels, face many sources of conflict. For example, the growing tendency for organizations to rely on geographically dispersed teams (groups whose members are separated by time and distance) creates special relationship challenges for managers, especially when it comes to leading direct reports. Those global challenges are related to everything from the simple difference in time zones to the more formidable differences of culture (which affects everything from work habits to communication), and can easily spawn tension.

Another area of potential conflict lies in the context of the contemporary organizational contract, which was created in a climate of layoffs, rapid technological change, and increased worker mobility. Conflict can also arise from competing priorities at home and work, both for you and for your direct reports.

Conflict Resolution Experience

What would you do again?

What would you do differently?

How will you be viewed after this conflict management session?

Will people want to be led and influenced by you as a result?

Can you build on this encounter to further develop your direct reports?

Has your conflict management strategy enhanced your relationships with your direct reports?

Limited or shrinking resources that ask managers and direct reports to do more with less and to manage multiple projects can also contribute to discord. Pressure also falls on working and personal relationships as the increased mobility of workers at all organizational levels makes it harder to build solidarity among groups. Another important source of conflict lies in the disagreements your direct reports may have with each other. When you mediate those disputes your behavior can itself generate conflict and have a significant impact on your direct reports' productivity.

The Triple-M

Developing the skill to successfully manage conflict with direct reports requires experience and reflection. It also requires some awareness of the themes that often play out before, during, and after you deal with a conflict. As you develop your own strategy for successfully resolving such conflicts, it can be useful to have an outline of those themes. To help you remember, think of the triple-M.

Motivation. Make it your work to seek resolution to conflicts that block effective relationships, thwart effectiveness, create dissension, distract from organizational objectives, and threaten results.

Mindfulness. Develop an awareness of your role in conflict situations. Realize that what you do and say has an impact on others for good or ill. Try to understand how others see you.

Maturity. Pay attention to the bigger picture and think strategically. Learn the difference between what you can change and what you must accept. Maturity requires knowing what you can't allow to happen and what you can accept if it's a way to a solution.

In the quest to become a more successful manager and a more effective leader, few skills are as important as solving conflicts with your direct reports. Successfully managing such conflicts requires

strategy, understanding multiple perspectives, setting clear objectives, reaching results, and developing potential. All of these tasks are part of building effective relationships, which is one of the most important tasks of a leader. Make time for this work in your daily schedule. Add it to your calendar and give it a high priority. By addressing this task you will succeed as a leader, your direct reports will succeed in their own development, and your organization will succeed in meeting its objectives.

Suggested Readings

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Background

For over thirty years the Center for Creative Leadership has conducted educational programs based on its research, and in 1983 it began exploring the dynamics of derailment among North American and European executives. Results from this research have been used in training programs, assessment instruments, and numerous human-resources initiatives in several organizations. Those results also came together with CCL faculty design efforts during the creation of Foundations of Leadership (FOL), a three-day activity-enriched program that teaches the basics of effective leadership.

FOL participants have provided a rich source of lessons related to the conflicts they face each day on the job. Those experiences come from a wide range of leaders working in a context of uncertainty and an ever-changing landscape. They get an opportunity to think about their roles in conflict situations, especially as they relate to direct reports. Many managers who are new to the role (and many who are not) neglect the relationship building that is so crucial to effective leadership. Instead they focus on the strengths that brought them to their current position – the ability to get results and to take charge. To become and remain successful, managers need to learn to get results through others. Some of that work involves managing the conflicts that occur as tasks are passed to direct reports. CCL's approach teaches managers to examine and learn from their experience so that they can recognize and address the emotional and rational sources of behavior to successfully manage conflict.

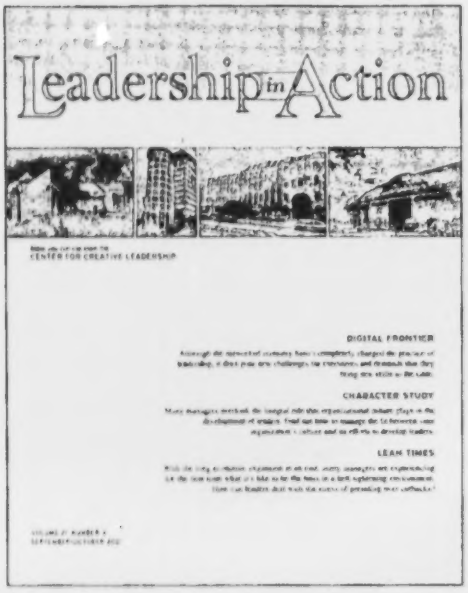
Key Point Summary

Conflict is inevitable when people work together because they have different points of view, values, and ways of working. Resolving conflicts can be extremely difficult because of those differences. But it's a challenge that successful leaders learn to address.

Changing demographics, a cross-cultural workforce, turbulent shifts in the global economy, new relationships between organizations and their employees, and other influences can define the conflicts that arise in organizations and affect strategies for managing them. Leading in such turbulent times requires managers to develop an understanding of multiple perspectives and to be willing to reshape their point of view. That skill – seeing more than one position – is crucial to developing a strategy that will help you manage conflict between you and your direct reports.

Conflict between managers and direct reports highlights two particular areas. One, it brings into play a power relationship that still exists even in this era of flatter organizations and empowered employees. Two, it affects the work itself – the tasks for which managers and direct reports share responsibility. In each of these areas managers can assess the differences between themselves and their direct reports to find out how those differences affect the conflict.

After that assessment, managers can devise a plan to use before, during, and after a conflict resolution session. That plan can include, among other things, being aware of emotional triggers, clarifying performance expectations, and dealing with differences. A focus on behavior and openness to new solutions will go a long way toward resolving a conflict between a manager and a direct report.



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Martin Wilcox, Editor

Leadership in Action is a bimonthly publication that aims to help practicing leaders and those who train and develop practicing leaders by providing them with insights gained in the course of CCL's educational and research activities. It also aims to provide a forum for the exchange of information and ideas between practitioners and CCL staff and associates.

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FOR THE PRACTICING MANAGER

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LEAD CONTRIBUTORS

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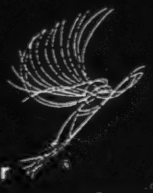
The Center for Creative Leadership is an international, nonprofit educational institution whose mission is to advance the understanding, practice, and development of leadership for the benefit of society worldwide. We conduct research, produce publications, and provide a broad variety of educational programs and products to leaders and organizations in public, corporate, and nonprofit sectors.



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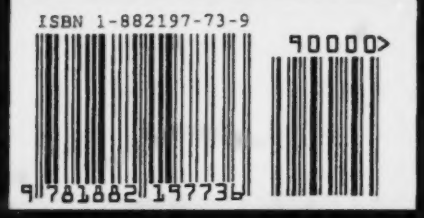

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